**Six Words for Life**

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Thank you for welcoming into the Kehillat Beth Israel community.

A few years ago, I became interested in six word memoirs. The idea is attributed to Ernest Hemingway. Supposedly, the novelist was once challenged to write a six-word story. He responded with, “For Sale: baby shoes, never worn.” Whether or not the story is true, those six words are powerful.

A book with a six word title, *Not Quite What I Was Planning*, features well-known people telling their stories. Stephen Colbert’s six-word memoir is “Well, I thought it was funny.” Imagine your story — part or all of it — told in exactly six words.

Here are some six word memoirs about life experiences:

* + Followed the rules; wish I hadn’t
	+ Living my fourth draft. Revising regularly.
	+ Read lots. Thought lots. Did lots.
	+ Always wanted to be somewhere else.
	+ My closet holds more than clothes.

There are six word insights about the beauty of our fragile natural world:

* + Observing miracles in little suburban gardens.
	+ Thank you for the rain. Night.
	+ Earth spoke softly. I thanked her.

There are Jewish six word memoirs:

* + i unplugged on Shabbat and reconnected.
	+ Found Jewish princess. Good-bye succulent pork.
	+ Didn’t get Seinfeld ’til met in-laws.
	+ Catholic in Jewish neighborhood: double guilt.
	+ Moved to Israel. Rest is history.

Of course, there are six word memoirs about Jewish mothers

* + You shtopt my soul with character.
	+ Unconditional love but hates my outfit..
	+ Welcome home. Want something to eat?
	+ My father is the Jewish mother.
	+ She’s older. Now I’m the worrier.

I wrote a few about myself:

* + Jew by birth and by choice.
	+ Amazed by God, fascinated by Torah.
	+ confusing childhood, questioning adult, learning husband.

What six words would you write about yourselves?

What six words would best articulate Judaism for you?

Try it with your family, with your kids.

I’m going to suggest two sets of six Hebrew words. Perhaps you can guess what they will be.

שְׁמַ֖ע יִשְׂרָאֵ֑ל ה אֱ-לֹהֵ֖ינוּ ה אֶחָֽד׃ Hear O Israel, Adonai is our God, Adonai alone.

We are commanded to write these six words on our doorposts, to bind them to our bodies and to speak of them when we sit at home and when we walk on our way. The Torah imagines and the history of our people confirms that Jewish life is often a journey. We bear witness to God in many settings. We might be on a mountain in Banff or in a boardroom. Wherever you go, remain aware of God - for inner security and moral direction.

There is another set of six words that you know and that define a core Jewish orientation to life. These are the six words that begin every berakhah.

ברוך אתה ה' אלהינו, מלך העולם … *Barukh ata Adonai Eloheinu, melekh ha’olam…*

*Olam* may refer to the world. It can also be a reference to time, as in *l’olam va’ed*. God as Ruler of time and space. This translation offers a perspective which Einstein would have welcomed.

*Berakhot* for ritual acts — candle lighting, hand washing, *motzeee*, *kiddush*, *shofar*, *lulav*, *matzah* — add another phrase: “*asher kidd’shanu be’mitzvotav* ~ you make us holy through mitzvot”.

The *berakhot* that I particularly love are the blessings of appreciation and recognition.

There are *berakhot* for scent and sight: fragrant spices and beautiful people. For seeing mountains and oceans, for being with a friend you didn’t see over the summer. There is a *berakhah* for enjoying a good cup of wine and even one for seeing a crowd of people in this sanctuary.

In the Tikvah program at Camp Ramah, I watched campers with different types of challenges recite their blessings. *Barukh ata H Elokeinu, melekh ha’olam*… I got dressed today and didn’t make a fuss. *Barukh ata H Elokeinu, melekh ha’olam* … I brushed my teeth.

As we move through our day, taking note of what is happening around us, *berakhot* train us to be aware and appreciative.

When the photos came in from the James E Web Space Telescope I wanted a *berakhah*. Shades of space lasers, the acronym is JEWS Telescope. I am in awe of the discovery this month that a planet orbiting a star 120 light years from Earth may have a hydrogen atmosphere and be covered in water. I am amazed at precision of the New Horizons spacecraft which launched in 2006 and flew by Pluto in 2015.

The capacity of human beings to act on our curiosity is extraordinary and deeply humbling. We can think of our life-journeys both from a day-to-day perspective and from the view of many years. Images and moments help us to construct an attitude of gratitude.

You don’t have to go to the outer reaches of the cosmos. Our Torah teaches us to take a journey of gratitude every day, to awaken and say *Modeh anee*, I thank you for being alive. Thank you for the functioning of my body and the restoration of my soul-life. And we finish the day by saying, *Barukh atah melkh ha’olam,* you close my eyes for sleep and security.

Rosh Hashanah is a day when we not only articulate hope for the coming year, but express gratitude for what we do have.

The six words of the Sh’ma remind us to be loyal to God and our tradition, to feel the security of God’s love, and to bring our core values and principles into our actions in society, wherever our journeys take us.

The six words that begin every *berakhah* teach us to be attentive and attuned to what we experience, not to sleepwalk through life, to be grateful and appreciative.

Jewish six word stories- *Sh’ma* and the start of every *berakhah* - can be with us on our daily journeys, to awaken and arouse, support and inspire.

As you walk forward into the new year of 5784, what six words will you speak on your journey?

I hope that all of us will be blessed with a Shanah tovah.

http://www.sixwordstories.net/about/

https://esahubble.org/videos/heic1206a/

<https://webbtelescope.org/news/first-images/gallery>

<https://solarsystem.nasa.gov/missions/new-horizons/in-depth/>

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/nasa-says-hint-of-oceans-potential-life-discovered-on-distant-world/>